

APR 11 1972

Letter from Taizé

Preparing for the Council of Youth

N° 9

February 1972

Quarterly — Community of Taizé (71) France — Phone (85) 38.22.44.

Yearly subscription : 2 U.S. Dollars; 60, g. p. k.
by internat. Money Order (or : CCP « Lettre de Taizé » 61446 Lyon).

your intuitions of all kinds
arriving here day after day
make it certain:
on the evening of Easter Day,
at Taizé, we are going
to be able to launch
out together on a
daring adventure
Roger, your brother

To prepare ourselves for the council of youth, we are living incognito, like leaven hidden in the dough, like a seed buried in the ground. And by that, without knowing how, little by little, we become bearers of news to be shared with all. Surely, that is what emerges from all the letters from young people published here ?

Pierino, working full-time in union action in Milan (Italy), writes :

Forming a single body

There are about 4,000 people living in the houses that I can see from my window. We live one on top of the other ; and one beside another. But we do not know each other at all. It takes more than being neighbours to form a single body.

The conditions for forming that one body exist. More than that, the techniques at our disposal could favour, even intensify, the realisation of this vocation that we have : to be a single body, to be one : to be brothers ! So is there no answer ? Is it no use hoping ? I really do not think so ; there is a reply.

I have seen a lot of workers begin the struggle because they had no other solution and because they were carried along by the general movement. Then afterwards, bit by bit, their awareness has grown until they in turn have become agents of combat and of unity. Such a change is made possible once the effort to achieve the aims of the struggle has become common to all. Because from then on there can be no question of one being preferred before another ; success depends on the pooling of

the availability and the creativity of each one. True, some have fallen away. But those who have quit have been the reason for others setting out, many others.

And we discover, living this, that those who were most committed, who spent themselves most in their action for their fellow-workers and for the common good became more fully men; their personality was not dispersed by that. Quite the reverse : it grew in complexity and in richness.

Then the reply is already there, the unifying force has shown itself, springing up amongst the men who were victims. Its name is political action — too poor a term for all that it contains, for all the visions of hope we load it with. It is a term to enrich with new meanings, to re-invent. Political action is for humanity what the unifying force is for individual cells. Building together, being ready to accept reduction of oneself to the essential in so doing, because here each one loses his life; and, as a result, emerging more fully aware. Those who struggle will understand.

Such is the present-day manner of prophesying the resurrection. It is so true, that words and promises are not enough. It becomes reality. And that bursts open our understanding of the word « political ».

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No springtime of the Church without those who are poor

For the last five years I have been living with a team in a transit zone. The young people there are underprivileged and after all these years of trying to go forward together, we created an event destined to provoke a breakthrough : a month's visit with 8 local youths to the United States. We spent a year preparing. The theme was to understand the poor in the United States. Unforgettable meetings : Ed and the Chicago ghettos ; the black populations of the South at Atlanta ; the poor whites in the Appalachians ; a group of Indians harrassed on all sides. All through the trip we met the leaders of the poor communities, lodging with ordinary families ; we met the leaders of the antipoverty campaign in Washington.

All this was a privilege that we do not want to keep for ourselves ; we want to base ourselves on it to start something moving amongst the young people of the Fourth World. A matter of giving a voice, a face to the youth that is out of work, maybe, or deprived of education, or in prison or retarded or handicapped. In any case, they are represented nowhere. That is my way of preparing the council of youth ; but my personal preparation will only have any sense if it really reaches those young peoples who are still living the civilisation of misery, more and more of them, in the « run-down » parts of our big towns. What I share is also a cry of hope : that the springtime of the Church will not leave them aside.

Friendship is born and grows

It is hard to say who belongs to the cell. Some have made themselves very fully available for the preparation of the council of youth. Some sixty others, perhaps, give a lot of time and energy.

Besides the young members of the immigrant workers' families, we now invite other foreign students and trainees. It is still hard to understand each other — there are fears and prejudices on both sides. But friendship is born and it is growing.

For our evening meetings there are young people from four countries and it is those from other lands who organise the evening. There are language classes with young Italians learning German and, reciprocally, young Germans learning Italian. Every afternoon adults and young people together help the immigrant workers' children with their homework. A group of 120 Indonesians has now asked to be able to come to our meetings.

So our cell is growing, without much effort on our part. Two Nigerians have joined us : Yahyah and Gabriel, and we would like to share with them in depth and for a long time. What a festival for Christmas ! We have often asked how we might live together. Yahyah says, « It is not easy, most people only live for themselves ; you can only live together by letting yourself be led by the Spirit of God. »

A cell from Marseille, France, describes one of their meetings :

A Church, place of communion

We are seeking a Church that is a place of communion, of attention, of meeting for all men. We want to make our house into a place of friendship where people of all political options, of every religious horizon and none, of every social condition, can understand each other and attempt a reconciliation by searching together how to give expression to love and faith in every-day life.

A Saturday evening like many others. Each arrives at the end of his work, or before starting, one by one, two or three together. The room looks too small this evening. There we are : sitting squashed together, so different, strangers, face to face, here because of friendship :

Alain had come along with Philippe, a student teacher encountered in the «Secours Populaire».

Marie-France and Henri stay a few minutes between sticking up posters denouncing the situation of the foreign workers at Marseille.

Jean-Pierre, brother of Huguette and two of his work-mates at the Renault car factory.

Jean-Pierre and Claude from Copainville (young workers' village) live in a «low» quarter of Marseille with the down-and-outs.

Baal is an African from Senegal : he follows the black question in the United States, wears «Black Panther» signs. He is smouldering inside.

Dam has come all the way from Lyon to be here — he is from Senegal and works in France : he is a smile, a silence, simplicity of heart.

Patrick and Geneviève : a young couple, a doctor and a speech-trainer.

Christiane, a nun, works in a hostel. She lives in a community in a part of Marseille where she works among young people as well.

Françoise, who teaches mal-adjusted children in the Jura, left her class at 11.30 that morning — 700 miles for 24 hours !

And others pass, rapidly. On that evening some fifty in all. With Marie-Paule and Huguette, we sense the force of such a moment : no apparent effect, but something gets through ; and we feel as though it does not depend on us at all.

What is the sense for us, today, of that news of life that is hidden, present in the Church all through the ages?

In history, by their message, the first christians introduced elements marking a break, a transformation. In what world are we now asked to be « first christians »?

How to render the Church poor, in the full dimension of the word?

We too are asked to dare to act, to hope.

(Pierino, Italy)

From Marinella, Rome (Italy) :

The Church of Rome

I can feel all the weight of the name, the history, the situation of my Church : the Church that is at Rome. As I reflect about the means to use so as to take part in the renewal of that Church, these words mean more and more to me : wait, store up in the heart all the things said, go forward on an interior adventure, in a deliberate poverty. Situations, of whatever kind, can only change if there is a fire burning within at the heart.

Reflecting with Massimo, we said : yes, run, because that is what we have young feet for. Not running after ambitious plans, dreams that are more or less practicable. Let us run as John to the tomb on the morning of Easter after the announcement of the resurrection. And following that adventure, let us learn to wait at the entrance to the tomb for Peter to arrive — he is older and runs slowly — and then, we can enter together.

Making visits

Sometimes people find it really difficult to get a cell going or to persevere in this small-scale sharing. « ... Our group gets carried away by over-intellectual discussions. We don't really share together. It's silly. We are still at the stage of expecting some miracle solution to appear from outside ourselves. » In big towns and some districts, many either in cells or alone are living the same undertaking within the preparation for the council of youth, but they never have occasion to meet.

Would it help if the visits made by young people travelling from place to place were longer in each town? That is what Angelina has tried to see by staying, for example, several weeks in Paris, visiting a different group each day accompanied by another group she had met on previous days : as in many countries at the same moment, an experience of the constructive dimension of making and receiving visits.

To pay a visit to someone is to go to his home to share his life. When you arrive at his house, he offers you something, a small sign of his esteem. To prove your friendship, you must accept his offer. Otherwise he will ask, « do you have something against me ? » (Dieudonné, Cameroon)

Supplement to the *Letter from Taizé*:
this article appeared in *Le Monde*
newspaper 20-1-72.

The Church : a fire that burns us

by brother Roger, prior of Taizé

Brother Roger began the first paragraph of the article by repeating what he had already written to you in the October *Letter from Taizé* : his confidence in the intuitions of young people — intuitions that are like stars in the night ; his «reckless hope» for the future, in spite of the great difficulties that might arise (... and that have not been lacking during recent weeks!). Then he continued :

The universal vocation of young people

It is true that young people today have an enormous variety of aspirations. But certain things characterise them : they want to act in favour of man where he is victim of man ; they try to communicate — for the christian, that becomes a search for communion.

Young christians desire such a communion — with man as with Christ — but without any rigid framework. Unlike their predecessors in 1950-1965, they cannot be said to be hostile to Church institutions : rather, they do not care about them and refuse to take them into account. They are not interested in reforms — they are awaiting the birth of something new. Where there is trust, it is because of what a person is, and when they turn to the experience of a man involved in running an institution, it is because they have seen in him a man of communion.

They cannot stand diplomacy and cleverness in the Church. Longstanding conflicts between groups of christians, and the stubborn maintenance of parallel confessions, they see as pointless rear-guard actions. Specifically confessional bodies that try to go toward them hear themselves being accused of trying to recuperate them for their own ends.

The sense that young people have of being intensely integrated into a human community on a planetary scale seems to betray in them a new awareness of the universal. Large numbers of young people look for their fulfillment in terms of a political society socialised at universal level. Might it be that, in their eyes, such a society has already taken the place of the Church?

A Springtime of the Church

When faced with the fact that very many young people reject the Church, why stand still to interpret that pessimistically, anxiously or even polemically? Is not the main thing to question ourselves thoroughly so as to discern beyond the immediate event the signs — already visible — of a springtime of the Church? At the present moment there are three main questions being asked, and all show how new ways forward can emerge from a situation that is in itself difficult.

A first, admittedly serious question is the rapid drop — in all Churches — in the number of vocations to the ministry. But at the same moment we are discovering the enormous untapped resources available with which to realise the ministry of the Church in quite new ways. Confronted with a vacuum, lay people are stimulated to exercise more explicitly their share in the common service that is given to each christian by his baptism. With that it at once becomes clearer what are the specific features of the priest's service : a service that needs to be lived in complementarity with the laity.

Then there is the question of involvement and action in favour of man : that, for many young people means political involvement, and often a revolutionary option. The long history of christians shows a notorious inability to be consequential here. Among the first christians, « socialisation » was a fact : far from continuing in that, christians have stored up more and more property. Since the 16th century, they have agreed with a system of lending money with interest. With that they have consented to a society so organised that the profits resulting from work are not distributed amongst all but are reserved for a tiny minority to enjoy. It seems to have taken the spur of marxism to stir the Church — arousing us from sleep and awakening the Church to a springtime — by stimulating it to become a community of sharing, stripped of the means of power and solidly one with those who are oppressed.

Unity : a fire

Then, a third question : it is obvious to many people today that after having made a leap forward, ecumenism is now bogged down in interconfessional institutions which by their very nature secrete a process of parallelism. Thus, these institutions are even capable of preventing the realisation of actual unity. Seeing this, large numbers of those who had once hoped for much from ecumenism now invest their energies in other directions. As for young people, they do not give it any attention. There are days when I come face to face with intolerance and repression : then I like to remember John XXIII who said : « Be joyful, look for what is best and let the sparrows chirp. » Such innocence of heart is like a draught of fresh air.

Young people worshipping and loving Christ in isolation, not bothering about his body the Church ; the Church replaced in their outlook by a politicised society ; ecumenism at a standstill : none of that would disturb me if Christ, before dying, had not prayed for the visible unity of all who are his. No way around

that : for Christ the credibility of christians is bound up with their real unity. It is by our visible communion that men can recognise what we live by. The unity, the ecumenicity of the Church is a fire lit across the whole world, a fire that burns us.

So how are we to break through ? How is the Church to respond to its ecumenical vocation : to be the place of catholicity, of universal communion, for all men ; a place where the non-believer is also at ease, without any kind of constraint ?

Our visible unity supposes certain points of unanimity, sources common to all to which we return constantly. So will there be any advance in ecumenism unless appeal is made to a pastoral ministry of unanimity, on a universal scale — and really concretely, because we are men with ears to hear and eyes to see ? Personally, I have been led in this direction by a man named John, and remain deeply marked by him. By his ministry, pope John XXIII opened my eyes to a new way of ecumenicity.

Can we say that a universal pastor, the bishop of Rome is leading us towards a Church of communion, refusing to rely on economic or political powers ? Surely, what we ask of this pastor, called to be poor, is to help us make present for each generation the sources of the faith, to promote a communion between all the local Churches and also, to summon in a few words, not just christians but many men who will listen, to fight against oppression ?

And now, to bring about unity, we are set at the heart of a dilemma : we cannot, even to discover a more universal communion, break away from our communion of origin. Denial is not part of the dynamism of modern man. Then, at the hinge of different generations, how to discover a way of double belonging ? Without demanding that anyone deny the faith honestly delivered by his fathers, will we find enough imagination and courage to reestablish our unity : and in so doing to become a leaven of communion and peace for the whole community of men throughout the inhabited world ?

How hard to find complementarity between North and South. What sign can be discovered ? Is reciprocity possible except by an intermixing of cultures and of everything in life ?

From Sylvie, South Africa :

Faced with inequality

Every Saturday we go with a group of young folk to visit a camp that is supposed to be temporary (one woman of over 50 tells that her grand-mother was born there). We are expected with very obvious impatience.

The huts are made of corugated iron, as rusty as can be, set in the sand in a region where there is almost always a strong wind blowing. It seems from what we are told that this summer is abnormally cold. Yet the other day the temperature was 41° at 6 p.m., without a breath of wind all day. How can men so reduce human beings as to oblige them to live in such conditions ?

How can you talk of festival with people who are almost certain never to know any other life than this ? Can they still have any reason for living a festival left in them ? I do not know. It is obvious that all the youth here is full of an ardent desire for justice in their country, this future council of youth gives me the only hope that I have ever had as to the acheivement of equality amongst men.

In the Cameroon and the Congo, we had some difficulty in expressing the festival « in the innermost heart of man », but here with the Ewé there is a difference between the « me » (interior life) and the « I » (exterior life). So the idea gets across. Only it is hard to connect the festival that is lived spontaneously, almost daily, and the presence of Christ in the festival.

(Patrick, Togo)

From Rémi and Bruno :

With Stanislas, a young African bishop

Today the social system in Rwanda and Burundi is such that anyone who stands out above the mass, who distinguishes himself, suffers such strong pressures that he is obliged to withdraw. For instance, in a centre for the reeducation of the physically handicapped that we much admired, the Africans can perfectly well see each decision, however serious, that has to be taken, but they ask the Europeans to take them : they could never stand up to the social pressures ensuing.

It seems very important to find ways of sharing the material wealth of those here on volunteer service with the Africans : but the problem is difficult to solve if the volunteers do not turn to the Africans for help in their reflexion. Some of the Africans see through « co-operation » very clearly. One of them remarked to me : « *What we need is for Europe to help us as brothers, instead of seeing us as poor wretches who need charity. But I suppose that that is asking too much of you Europeans ?* »

... We leave Stanislas to go and help other young Africans build a house for some « Batois » — an outcast tribe that is very neglected...

From Maryvonne, Claudine, Nathanael : and Mildrède and Kumar.

In the United States

We find ourselves insisting a lot on the importance of being attentive and open to the Southern Hemisphere during our voyages. We point to Latin America mainly ; few young Americans look beyond their own country, it is so huge.

Americans are very practical and we are often asked for guiding lines, recipes for action, or they ask for the date of the council of youth. We then try to reply that each one must create with what there is in him : his temperament, his situation, how he finds it possible to share with other people.

We met Tonny, who told us of the enormous impact on him of the journey to Europe and the meeting at Taizé. We can understand that with the oppression we sense here ; from that suddenly to become « someone » !

When we address meetings, the real exchanges are at the end, because it is always those who stay behind who want to become part of the « long march ». The Chicago group longs to find ways of going deeper and of acting — they are so aware of their mission to live by the joyful news and to spread it to those who surround them.

Summer at Taizé

International Youth Meetings preparing the council of youth will be organised every week from late June to mid-September, from the Monday evening to Sunday midday.

English will probably be the main language during the weeks July 17 - 23 and July 31 - August 6, if the participation justifies it.

Charter flights will bring young people from North America to the Meetings at Taizé. For details write soon to :

(for Easter) : Albert Fredette	(Summer) : Fr L. Murphy
100 rue Dufferin	US Catholic Conference
GRANBY P.Q. Canada	Education Department
	1312 Massachusetts Ave N.W.
	Washington DC 20005 USA

On the way to the Far-East

We have no desire to travel like those who are rich ; but since we are white, that is the label we wear. I am so happy when an Indian gives me a present : a fruit or a cigarette ... they are so used to receiving everything from the northern hemisphere.

Far too often the only thought of the « Western People » is to import and to recreate Europe or America here. A project that would be fine there makes nonsense here : everything well organised, self-sufficient almost, no money problem ... and too cut off from life around.

It seems to have been forgotten that a real move ahead is made on a basis of dialogue — equal to equal — in trust and friendship. Few Europeans live discretely among the people, making themselves available to them, living accessibly. It looks as though a two-years' stay is just enough to acquire familiarity with the poverty or the problems, to lay the first bases of trust...

Patrick is one of a cell of young people making a journey in West Africa. He is originally from Ghana but, born in France, he had never known his father's family. During the journey, he visits his grandparents :

In Ghana

We arrive at the village of my grandparents, where my aunt points out an old woman with a peaceful face, white hair — my grandmother. She learns who I am, hugs me in her arms, weeps. Then she goes and whispers something to an old man working at an anvil. He too weeps, and then he — my grandfather — and my grandmother come to embrace me. They ply me with questions about the family in Paris. And then the numerous uncles, aunts

and cousins start to arrive and the courtyard is soon full of people. I am called by my father's name, palm-wine is brought.

My grandfather is Avafia (warrior-king). The next day, after the morning prayer, we go to greet the Great King, the wisest man of the main village who has the charge of deciding all the movements of warriors in the region.

Then comes the ceremony of the return. We are offered tea while we wait for the dignitaries to arrive. The women of the family tie beads about our right wrists — the custom when a child or a dear one returns who was thought lost, after a serious illness or a very long absence a long way away. The dignitaries arrive and my grandfather tells them the story, from the departure of my father until my arrival. After that, I have to tell them my story. Two elders signal to me to follow them and we go into the centre of the garden. I have on the family garment. There, turning toward the mountain, the eldest of all repeats the story to the ancestors; two men bring up a sheep, the elder cuts its throat and then moistens my feet in the blood, which he also applies to my forehead and cheeks so that God protect me. Again we sit down and one of my aunts passes with a gurd of white clay mixed with water, that she applies to the right arm of every member of the family: in addition, my grandparents and I are marked on the forehead — like the bracelet, a symbol of the child returned and of the land held in common.

During the evening meal, my grandfather declared: « *Now my heart and my house are at peace, for the child we thought lost has returned.* » He added how happy he was to know that I am going to « *travel for the word of God* ».

We had just re-lived the parable of the prodigal son. The only difference was that, in my story, the younger brother of my father was rejoicing with us all.

EASTER AT TAIZÉ

Three days spent together mainly to celebrate the Risen Christ : days of festival so prepared that the large numbers will not prevent sharing in groups. Places of silence will be available for those so wishing. « *On the evening of Easter Day we are going to be able to launch out together on a daring adventure.* »

Date : from the afternoon of Saturday April 1st
to midday Monday April 3rd

(at the heart of this meeting : Easter Evening at 8 p.m.)

Two possibilities for those wishing to stay longer :

- Thursday afternoon 30 March to midday Monday 3rd April (days of prayer and personal reflexion preparing for Easter) ;
- or from Saturday afternoon April 1st to Wednesday morning April 5.

These limits should not be exceeded : this favours the impact of the days here.

Age : from 18 to 30 years old.

Indicated price : 9 fr. per day including meals (2 dollars US or 75p GB).

At Easter, the nights can be cold : bring blankets, sleeping bags and inflatable mattresses. If possible, bring your own tent.

The reception team will take care of all the material preparation for the meeting. Those wishing to be part of it should write to us and should arrive on Monday afternoon March 27. They will be worked extremely hard.

Everything will be done using six languages.

To help the work of the reception team, it is necessary to inscribe using the registration form on the last page. We will be glad to send more forms. We shall note your inscription. Do not expect us to confirm.

Don Fragoso, bishop in the Nordeste in Brazil — one of the poorest parts of the world — writes :

Liberation

Christ the liberator has sown seeds of freedom at the heart of history, and they have an irresistible dynamism. But man is only free and liberator with Christ by a heart that is poor : the conscience of the prodigal son, trust in the Father's tenderness, conviction that his love is of more effect than all our human fragility. The only thing left for him is to be like one of the « Poor of the Lord ». Man, by himself, is powerless to achieve liberation. In these ways, hidden and revealed by the dark light of the mystery of Christ alone, the promised liberation comes to pass in history. But full liberation — a united and happy people in a free land — is a Utopia : present as a certainty, distant as a promise not yet completely fulfilled.

(see also his article in *Communion* 1971/4.

Felipe, Spain :

Realising one's dignity as a man

Here at Avila, there is hardly any industry. The population is scattered in small villages right up into the mountains.

What we are trying to discover together is directly in the line of the council of youth. Together with the youth of the villages, we are going into the meaning of the word « festival » and we are trying to see what, here, concretely, makes men victims. Little awareness of their human dignity, a very low cultural level. How to prepare the departure for the big towns — many will have to go, to look for work ?

We believe that Christ is present in the events of each day. We are trying to be men of peace, « peacemakers ». Because if the discovery of what the situation really is leads to nothing but fierce revolt, in what sense will we have advanced the dignity of other men ?

*From now on, the Letter from Taizé
will appear in a sixth edition : in portugese.*

Registration Form : EASTER 1972

Return to :

« YOUTH-MEETINGS », F - 71 - Taizé-Community, France

Name :

First name :

Full Address :

(with zip-code and country)

Profession : year of birth :

Will take part in the meeting

- * Saturday 1st to Monday 3 April ;
- * Thursday 30 March to Monday 3 April ;
- * Saturday 1st to Wednesday 5 April.

Already took part in a meeting at Taizé in 1970 or 1971 : yes-no

Will bring own tent, with free places.

Will be part of the reception team from 27 March : yes-no

Can be in discussion groups speaking french — italian — german
— english — spanish — portugese or

Can help with simultaneous translation from French into

Please send more registration forms.

Dir., Réd., Adm. Communauté de Taizé — D.L. : n° 346 — 1^{er} tr. 1972